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So Much More than Decoding: A Brief Guide to Working with Adolescent Struggling Readers

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So Much More than Decoding: A Brief Guide to Working with Adolescent Struggling Readers

This brief guide for teachers - and student teachers, in particular - is intended to introduce and explain key concepts, research perspectives and practical intervention strategies that are useful when working with secondary school-aged pupils who have difficulties with reading. Sometimes, this group of young people is described as 'adolescent struggling readers' (ASRs), a description that is meant to signal that these difficulties with reading are experienced personally, socially and emotionally by the young people concerned. Having a difficulty with reading is not just a cognitive phenomenon. The evidence-base of research into the nature of the difficulties ASRs encounter strongly suggests that it is not simply the relationship between letters and sounds (decoding) that is the issue but broader and more complex questions of meaning-making and of identity - as learners and readers.

1. So what's the problem?

Learning to read effectively and enthusiastically is not a simple matter. It involves both recognising words - mapping their sounds onto their written form - and also making sense of those words. The words of written texts are typically very different from conversation, carrying heavier loads of meaning through a wider vocabulary and more tightly structured forms than conversation does. So reading is so much more than decoding the words on the page or screen.

Capable 11 year olds arrive at secondary school, well used to reading, with ease and effectiveness, a range of texts for a range of purposes. Much of this has been to achieve goals others have set for them, but many also have a substantial experience of reading for their own purposes, including entering into the lives and minds of others through narrative. Some even have experience of engaging with the pleasures of poetry. These students know how to read to learn. Most future teachers started their secondary education in this positive spirit, confident in their ability to put written words to use.

But other students start their secondary education very differently. Those who, at the end of primary school, do not read with such ease, skill and commitment are at a very real disadvantage, both in profiting from what the secondary school has to offer and also in making their way in the world outside. They may be able to read a simple text with a degree of accuracy and derive some meaning from it, but they do not habitually enlarge their knowledge and understanding of the

world through the written word. They are likely to have a poor view of their own capabilities and may resist attempts to help them. They may be or become 'hard to reach', perhaps even part of a sub-culture of resistance to all the school has to offer (Lenters, 2006). By the age of 15 or so, such students are likely to have become alienated from the whole educational process.

Across the European Union (EU), one child in five struggles to reach a level of reading that enables them to read to learn by the time they are adolescents. Figures range from a low of 8% struggling readers in Finland to more than 40% in Bulgaria and Romania.

Nearly half of all 15-year-old students (46%) agreed ... that they read only to obtain information they needed, while almost as many (41%) reported that they only read if they had to.

A quarter of 15 year olds claim that reading is a waste of time, while 37% never read for pleasure.

Between 2000 and 2009 the level of reading for enjoyment declined steadily, particularly for boys, across all types of print reading material except comic books.

(EU High Level Group, 2012, p.72, from OECD, 2010)

This problem is not confined to the UK. In 2012, the European Union (EU) commissioned a High Level Group of experts in literacy education to assess the state of literacy learning in Europe and make recommendations. This group began by examining the figures for EU countries from the recent PISA (Programme of International Student Achievement) survey of 15 year olds in countries all over the world (OECD, 2010). Their analysis painted a worrying picture of adolescent readers across the EU.

This has caused concern at the highest levels. In 2009, the EU Education and Training Strategic Framework set the goal of reducing the proportion of low achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science to less than 15% by 2020. The intention was for 85% to achieve at least PISA Level 2. This is classed as functional reading and includes locating information, recognising main ideas, understanding relationships, some use of inference and some comparisons and contrasts. In 2009, 18% of England's 15 year olds failed to achieve this level.

Meanwhile, the EU High Level Group has recommended that by 2020 at least 85% should achieve the more demanding PISA Level 3.

The definition of PISA Level 3 includes:

- integration of information from different parts of the text to infer a main idea, understand a relationship or construe the meaning of a word or phrase;
- evaluation of features of the text;
- demonstration of a fine understanding of the text in relation to familiar everyday knowledge.

Systematic analyses of a proliferating number of studies addressing the needs of ASRs (e.g. Scammacca et al., 2007; Slavin et al., 2008) show that such students can be helped. However, the ADORE-Project (Garbe et al., 2009), a qualitative study across 12 European countries, found that 'reading literacy is still defined as a competence which has to be acquired in elementary school and need not be systematically developed afterwards' (2009, p.1). The project also found that few secondary teachers had sufficient knowledge and skills to diagnose struggling readers and implement interventions to assist them.

2. What does reading involve?

Reading is one of the most popular and productive areas of research in Education and in Psychology. Reading Education, as a field of study, relies on many linguistic terms as well as psychological and pedagogical concepts. At the end of this booklet, there is a glossary of technical terms with which you may not be familiar.

Word identification

The orthography- or spelling system - of English is notoriously complex. While the graphemes (letters or groups of letters) in words such as 'dog' and 'cat' correspond one-to-one with the phonemes (the smallest unit of speech sound), this is far from typical. It doesn't work for words such as 'one' and 'two'. So word recognition is harder in English than in Spanish or Finnish. In England, approaches to teaching word recognition have focused on:

- phonics - 'decoding' new words through grapheme-phoneme connections
- whole words - memorising each word as a one-off

- the use of context clues – using information from the known words around a problem word, which may be semantic (clues about meaning) or syntactic (clues about grammar).

Battles have raged over which should dominate in the teaching of reading in the early stages. The exclusive use of the whole word approach has fallen out of favour, as the learner is given no strategy for identifying new words independently. But there are too many ‘one-offs’ in English for this to be dropped completely.

Fluent readers of English use all three approaches to identify words. However, the complexity of English orthography means that to be effective, phonic knowledge must extend well beyond matching individual letters with individual phonemes. It must include larger patterns such as ‘gate’ and ‘late’, ‘wild’ and ‘child’, ‘could’ and ‘should’, ‘little’ and ‘bottle’ and many others, none of which can be ‘sounded out’ grapheme by grapheme. Researchers have shown that fluent young readers make use of such flexibility: they don’t ‘sound out’ all the words they read in the same way, but attend to letter groupings of different sizes in different words (Brown and Deavers, 1999).

Very many common English words (such as ‘learn’ ‘many’ and ‘word’) do not follow any easily discernible phonic rule or pattern and must either be learned as one-offs, or identified using the clues provided by the problem word’s context. Again, extensive research shows that effective young readers make use of such context clues (Goodman et al., 2005).

The aim, of course, of all approaches to word recognition is to make it an automatic process, so that the reader can focus on the meaning of the text, rather than laboriously plodding through it word by word.

Current governmental policy in England is based on the ‘Simple View of Reading’ (SVR), which sees it as ‘*word identification plus language comprehension*’, with the implication that the two can be taught separately. It also favours the exclusive teaching of synthetic phonics in the earliest stages, which means identifying the word phoneme by phoneme and then synthesising the phonemes – putting them together. A strict application of this approach can limit a reading diet and can encourage the development of a one-track approach to word identification.

Fluency

Fluency – the ability to read aloud smoothly and with a meaningful intonation – matters, mainly because it allows a greater volume of reading, leading, in a virtuous circle, to improvement. Fluency also indicates a measure of comprehension – at least at the level of the sentence. It should receive at least as much attention as accuracy.

Comprehension

Comprehension is usually used to mean the capacity to construct meaning from running text. This is not a simple process. There are, of course, different levels of comprehension, depending on the complexity and degree of abstraction of the text on the one hand and the purposes of the reader– the kinds of meaning sought – on the other. Even at the simplest levels, comprehension inevitably involves bringing one’s own knowledge and understanding to the process of making sense of the text.

The component skills of PISA Level 3 involve such faculties as the understanding of complex grammatical structures, verbal reasoning and inference. Although some students may find their own routes to the development of these skills, most need explicit teaching, careful guidance and support if they are to become effective, enquiring readers.

Attitudes, self-awareness and identity as readers

Students who read more, get better at reading, so attitudes to reading matter. It matters too how confident learners feel about their reading and how they see themselves as readers. Those who like reading, who are confident in the effectiveness of their reading and who see themselves as committed readers, move forward more surely. Positive values in this area depend in part on the social group the adolescent identifies with, the kind of role they see themselves taking in the world beyond school and the extent to which literacy figures in these. ASRs can develop identities as ‘struggling readers’ and so one of the challenges for teachers is to work with adolescents to seek a breakthrough in their identities as readers.

3. Some problem areas for adolescent readers

Studies tend to show that only a small minority of ASRs have basic decoding difficulties, while others can decode words in isolation, but not in running text (e.g. Buly and Valencia, 2002). Some 20% of ASRs combine slow and deliberate decoding with ‘adequate’ comprehension, while some 40% decode reasonably well, but show real comprehension problems. There can be no one simple solution for all struggling readers. We need to look carefully at where each student’s problems lie, not impose a universal ‘solution’.

Problems with word identification

Most ASRs have developed vocabularies of dozens, even hundreds of words that are recognised on sight. Most have mastered the simple one-to-one phonic

correspondences, although they may have difficulties with some of the more complex spelling patterns of English. They may fail to see any regularity in words such as 'caught', 'mild' or 'battle' and have problems with multi-syllabic words. They may also simply read far too slowly to allow themselves to focus on the meaning of the text: word recognition has not become automatic.

Problems with fluency

A number of struggling readers approach all texts very slowly, tackling one word at a time, in a kind of 'dalek-speak', without the variations of pitch, pause and stress that we use to communicate meaning in spoken language. This means they read less. Volume of reading matters: Brozo et al. observe that 15 year olds from low income families who read a lot have higher reading scores than children from higher income families who read less (Brozo et al., 2008).

Problems with comprehension

Comprehension difficulties may arise because students do not read enough to be at ease with the vocabulary and sentence structures of written language, because the texts they are asked to read are too difficult or not clearly structured, or because teachers confuse comprehension with recall of content, giving their students few opportunities to summarise, analyse, synthesise or discuss what they have read (Allington, 2012).

Problems with attitude, self-awareness and identity as readers

These tend to figure large in the problems of adolescent struggling readers. As the EU High Level Group states, 'two defining characteristics of adolescents who struggle with reading are a lack of confidence in their own abilities and a lack of motivation' (EUHLG, 2012, p.74). Boys, in particular, often develop less positive attitudes to reading at the transition to secondary school (Jacobs et al., 2002). Reading may be seen as a predominately feminine activity that plays little or no significant part in the lives of their peers or role models. In addition, teenagers, particularly those from migrant backgrounds and lower social classes, may feel that the school does not value their cultural practices (Lenters, 2006).

4. So what can we do? Successful intervention strategies

Interventions can make a positive difference, even at a comparatively late stage (Dole et al., 1996; Guthrie and Humenick, 2004). However, in addition to tackling both technical and comprehension aspects of reading, the most effective

interventions focus on making students more confident, more autonomous and more aware of the positive role reading can play in their lives (Dole et al., 1996; Guthrie and Humenick, 2004).

Tackling word identification and fluency

A very small minority of ASRs may need help with the very earliest stages of word identification – relating phonemes to the graphemes that most straightforwardly represent them. But there is wide agreement that for students who have acquired these basic sound-symbol correspondences, any return to them in later years is a potential waste of intervention time (Ivey and Baker, 2004). However, some ASRs may need to be helped to see more complex phonic patterns and relationships and to identify multisyllabic words and their component morphemes. This demands a systematic approach, tailored to the needs (and interests) of the individual learner.

Given the importance of motivation with this age group, these technical matters should be addressed in ways that are not demeaning to the students and don't remind them of earlier failures. Successful initiatives in this area at secondary level usually involve one-to-one tuition, for 15 to 30 minutes or so, usually twice a week, lasting from 6 to 34 weeks. Although some incorporate interactions with a computer, none of these effective programmes is exclusively computer-based.

The more successful programmes tend to use coherent meaningful texts rather than wordlists, making it possible to develop fluency – the ability to read aloud smoothly and with a meaningful intonation – as well as accuracy. Tutors (skilled teachers are best, but peer-tutoring can be remarkably successful) may invite the student to re-read a text until fluency is achieved. They will also tend to keep any interruption of the student's reading to an absolute minimum, as the aim is for students to become increasingly adept at monitoring their own reading and correcting their own errors.

Many of the more successful programmes involve finely levelled books intended to be of interest to the age-group, while *BRP Boosting Reading Potential* (formerly known as the *Better Reading Partnership*) involves a variety of fiction, non-fiction and poetry texts from a range of sources, including magazines and newspapers.

As Brooks' comprehensive survey of intervention schemes in the UK shows, besides BRP, the interventions that have been more successful in making significant improvements to the accuracy of struggling readers in England include *Paired Reading*, *Rapid Plus*, *THRASS* (taught in a group) and *Thinking Reading* (Brooks, 2013). However, the effectiveness of some programmes varies from site to site, indicating that, as well as the choice of programme, its interpretation and application matter too.

Paired Reading with Peer Tutors

Student tutors, who are more proficient readers than their tutees, but not necessarily older, are trained in the 4 P strategy: Preview, Pause, Prompt and Praise.

Developed by Professor Keith Topping of the University of Dundee, this programme benefits both the tutee and, perhaps surprisingly, the tutor. Originally intended as a way for parents to help their children at home, it has been remarkably successful all over the UK, with year groups from 1 to 11, making significant gains in reading. The aim is to eliminate the struggling reader's dependence on an external monitor.

The tutee chooses a text from a selection of books that are not too difficult. The tutor then guides the tutee through a *Preview* of the text, with a brief discussion of the title and the cover, inviting the tutee to speculate on what the book is about. They then begin to read aloud in unison, until the tutee feels confident to read alone, which s/he signals by knocking the desk. The tutee then carries on alone.

If s/he misreads a word or gets stuck, the tutor does not rush in with help, but *Pauses*, counting to three silently, or waits until the end of the sentence. This gives the tutee time to self-correct, through reading past the problem word to the end of the sentence, re-reading the part of the sentence before it, and/or examining the problem word closely. In other words the tutee is given time to behave like a skilled reader. If the tutee has still not identified the word, the tutor supplies a *Prompt*, initially inviting the tutee to read the sentence again. If this fails, the tutor supplies the word. Once the word is identified, tutee and tutor continue the reading in unison, until the tutee knocks the table again. The tutor gives *Praise* whenever the child successfully self-corrects, and also gives praise at the end of the reading.

(Topping and Ehly, 1998)

A note of warning: for students who are really struggling, it may be tempting to focus on word identification skills and leave comprehension issues until later. But this is not likely to make students feel better about their reading or even to enable them to read with significantly greater accuracy.

Tackling reading volume

To read more effectively, students need to read more (Cipielski and Stanovich, 1992; Brozo et al., 2008). General exposure to a variety of texts is seen to be

important in developing the advanced vocabulary demanded by much secondary reading (Greenleaf et al., 2001; Slavin et al., 2008; Fisher and Ivey; 2006).

A number of US projects have focused simply on increasing the volume of students' reading. Guthrie et al. (1999) found that reading volume predicted reading comprehension scores in 3rd, 5th, 8th and 10th grade students, even when factors such as prior knowledge and motivation were statistically controlled.

But voluntary, engaged reading, where the students are deep into books of their own choice, whether inside school or out, has a stronger relationship to reading growth than does the volume of reading they are required to do by school (Wang and Guthrie, 2004).

In a dramatically effective three year Randomised Controlled Trial, Allington and colleagues simply invited randomly selected groups of students in their last year of high-poverty elementary school to choose 15 books they would like to receive, as they examined a wide range of texts at a book fair in their school. At the end of the school year, each experimental student received 12 of the chosen 15 books to take home.

With no further intervention, the experimental students scored significantly higher than the control group on a reading test at the start of their secondary schooling, with an overall effect size of .14. For those from the poorest families the difference was particularly pronounced, with an effect size of .21.

(Allington et al., 2010)

One of the most successful ways of increasing the volume of reading is to get self-chosen books into students' homes. Schools need to find ways of doing this.

Tackling the availability of suitable texts

All secondary students need texts that they can read with ease, accuracy and understanding. *Accelerated Reader*, a commercial programme that aims to match students to books of appropriate difficulty, offers a wide range of texts for struggling readers. The books are lively, but like many commercial schemes, this programme depends on limited monitoring systems, heavily reliant on low level recall questions.

Over recent decades the provision of texts for struggling readers outside structured programmes has markedly improved in the UK, in terms of the

readability of the text, interest level and production values (e.g. *Barrington Stoke* books).

Series books, such as the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* books (Kinney, 2007-11) are particularly appealing to struggling readers, since once they have tackled the first, the succeeding texts become easier to read. Magazines can similarly be more accessible, particularly where they concern topics of real interest.

Teachers can also make texts more accessible by reading alluring openings in an inviting way and then making the book available for a chosen few. Small sets of 6-8 books can be useful here, and can make the act of reading more social.

But ASRs also need accessible textbooks for the various content areas. Science texts, in particular, can prove very problematic. Teachers of all subjects where books are used need to monitor the degree of reading challenge these pose their students.

Various readability formulae have been devised to assess the level of difficulty of texts. These involve analyses of a sample of the text in terms of sentence length or complexity, together with word length or frequency. Such formulae provide only a rough and ready indication of text difficulty. Many, such as the *Dale-Chall Readability Formula* (Chall and Dale, 1995) and the *Flesch-Kincaid Readability Formula*, are available online. Typing in or scanning text samples will yield a US grade equivalent of text difficulty. However, they neglect important matters such as whether a text is well written (or even whether it makes sense) how it is supported by illustrations and layout, how interesting it is and how it relates to the reader's previous knowledge. Yet all these features significantly influence whether a struggling reader experiences the text as accessible or not.

The best way to assess the difficulty of a text is to observe students reading it. If a student appears to be having problems, it is advisable to carry out a Running Record (Clay, 1993), or Miscue Analysis (Goodman et al., 2005) and/or ask the student to summarise the text read, perhaps orally. The 3 Finger Rule can also be useful. A student tackling a 100 word sample of the text holds up a finger for each word s/he can't read. If three fingers or more are held up at the end, the text is probably too hard.

If the text is too hard, more accessible texts must be found. This may be problematic and may mean that a class is using several texts for a topic rather than one. This should be seen as an enrichment of resources, offering the possibility of comparison in terms of the information presented and the points regarded as most significant.

Most text produced in the 21st century is digital. In order to be properly literate, today's adolescents need to feel comfortable with finding their way around the

internet. They need access in school to computers/mobile devices and guidance in how to make the most of them. This will produce benefits for off-line reading as well: as PISA has shown, students who engage extensively in online reading are generally more proficient readers than students who do little online reading (OECD, 2010).

Tackling comprehension

A number of programmes for struggling readers that tackle comprehension (e.g. *Accelerated Reader*) are based on a limited school view of what comprehension is about, focusing on low level recall questions, with no evocation of relevant knowledge or teaching of comprehension strategy.

The few research studies on comprehension carried out with struggling readers also focus on recall. But a number of comprehensive reviews of studies on mainstream classrooms have identified more productive approaches (e.g. Dole et al., 1996; Guthrie and Humenick, 2004; Almasi et al., 2006), agreeing on four major points:

- reading comprehension scores can be significantly improved by teaching;
- teachers can learn how to teach comprehension, which involves moving away from published schemes that assess proficiency in comprehension without improving it;
- it takes time for students to learn effective strategies: most successful interventions involve instruction and repeated application lasting many weeks;
- only a few strategies have been shown to be central to the improvement of conventional scores:
 - activating prior knowledge
 - summarising
 - lessons in story grammar
 - imagery
 - question generation
 - thinking aloud.

Together with repeated opportunities for students to use the strategy for themselves on texts that are of interest to them, teacher demonstration has been found to be central to teaching such strategies. Students also need to learn to combine strategies: although it may be advisable to introduce strategies one at a time, a rigorous survey of qualitative studies, carried out by Almasi et al. (2006) demonstrates that effective teaching involves students in learning how to use

the strategies together rather than in isolation. For example, summarising might involve activating prior knowledge, question generation and thinking aloud.

Tackling more demanding comprehension

In most of the comprehension research cited above, success has been judged on students' achievements on conventional tests, with their dominant focus on recall questions. But our students need more than such limited comprehension skills. PISA Level 3 questions involve making sense of text in a way that relates it to other knowledge and experience. In learning to make such 'real sense', talk must play a large part. Discussion is increasingly seen as playing a key role in developing what Allington (2012) terms 'thoughtful readers' (e.g. Palincsar and Brown, 1984; Dole et al., 1986; Guthrie, 2004; Taylor et al., 2003; Nystrand, 2006).

Poor comprehenders have a particular need to make connections between the text in front of them and what they already know and have experienced. Discussion is the way to achieve this, both before and after reading the text. Each student has his or her own unique set of experiences and knowledge to bring to bear on a text. When students make their own connections between the text, their personal experiences, what they have read elsewhere and what they know of the world, they engage in the act of enlarging their understanding of the text. So the most effective discussion is not teacher-dominated, with the teacher being the arbiter of 'right answers' (Palincsar and Brown, 1984; Nystrand, 2006).

A thoughtful approach to comprehension is applicable to content areas as well as to the reading of novels and poetry. For example, a history lesson starts by eliciting prior knowledge on the topic. This not only stimulates engagement, it also primes the students to identify what is significant in the texts they are about to read. Discussion afterwards involves examining how the topic is treated by different texts and comparing the event under study with similar events today. Far from being an expensive waste of time, all the studies cited above, have shown that such discussion is clearly related to improved achievement.

Lessons of this sort are particularly needed in the classrooms of lower achievers, who are most likely to be restricted to a diet of copying, remembering and interrogation about factual detail (Taylor et al., 2003).

The social dimensions of comprehension.

Overt classroom talk about the process of making sense of texts offers students a model for the internal discussion that is central to deeper comprehension. Greenleaf et al (2001) see metacognitive discussions between teacher and student as key to enabling students to monitor their reading and work out how to approach new texts. In this way the invisible process of making meaning

is demystified (2001 p.92). In a penetrating qualitative study, they report on an Academic Literacy course, operating in a High School in a high poverty neighbourhood that has enabled Grade 9 students to take strategic control of their reading processes, through questioning, paraphrasing and clarifying their understanding of the texts, often self-chosen. The authors conclude that to make significant progress in narrowing the achievement gap for diverse urban students:

... we must build on the strengths of our young people by inviting them to be active participants in their own learning, by demystifying the hidden processes of reading for understanding, by putting their confusion and difficulties to classroom use, and by helping them to make connections between their strategic thinking and behavior outside of school and their academic performance and reading achievement inside school (Greenleaf et al., p. 118).

Meek et al. conclude their narrative account of a three year intervention in five London secondary schools: 'In the lessons we have reported, you find us trying to negotiate new relationships with our pupils and to pass the initiative for learning over to them' (Meek et al., 1983, p. 221).

Co-operative group work may provide a similarly empowering dialogue. In an ambitious systematic review of approaches to improving the reading of Middle and High School students (aged 10+years), Slavin et al (2008) found that programmes designed to change the teacher's role and daily teaching practices were substantially more effective than those that focused on curriculum or technology alone. The programmes involving co-operative learning, such as peer-assisted learning and team reading, together with mixed method approaches, involving large group, small group and computer-assisted individual instruction, were particularly effective.

The ADORE-Project (Garbe et al., 2009) found many examples of what they perceived to be good practice, characterised by cyclical and student-centred organisation (2009, p.8) and 'a great deal of research evidence that Adolescent Struggling Readers are supported most strongly by a socio-constructivist model of learning and teaching, which attributes importance to both the social and the cognitive dimensions, and shapes roles accordingly' (Garbe et al 2009, p.96).

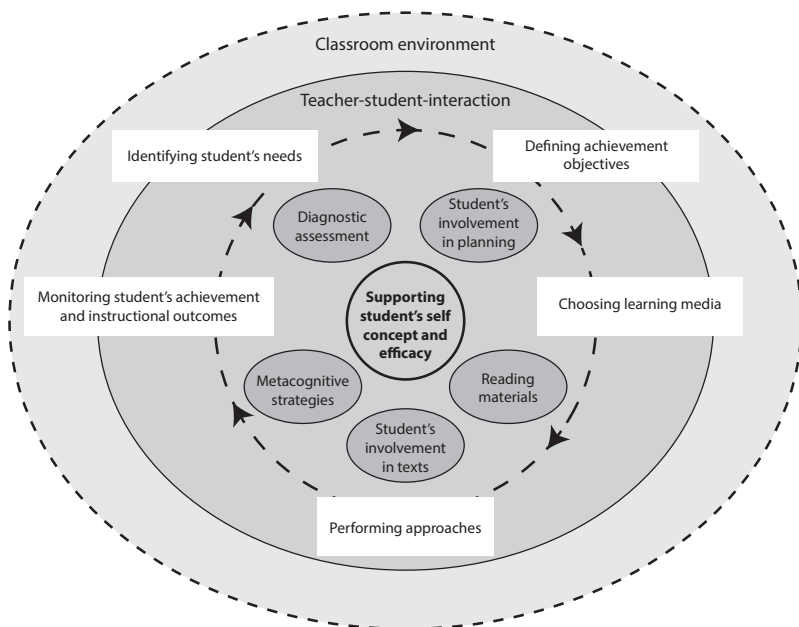


Figure 1: Reading Instruction Cycle (from Garbe et al. p. 92)

Like many of the researchers cited above (e.g. Dole et al., 1996; Guthrie, 2004) Garbe et al. see that modelling and scaffolding by the expert teacher in a climate that supports the student's self-concept and self efficacy, moves the student forward. At the same time, active involvement by the student characterises all such learning, from establishing goals through choosing texts to monitoring outcomes.

But this does not tell the whole story. Such good practice can only develop and endure if the fundamental conditions are right. Productive classroom practice itself requires a supportive context, Garbe et al. specify whole school support for reading programmes, teacher training and professional development, legal and financial resources and appropriately focused national reading research, without which good classroom practice cannot be sustained.

5. The way forward

In order to develop the competence and change the self-concept of ASRs, classroom practice needs to change in fundamental ways. As Garbe et al. put it, 'The target of all action must be the *independent reader and learner*, who is no longer dependent on the help of others (Garbe et al., 2009 p. 244). This review of the literature points towards key areas and action through which this might be achieved.

In the relationship between teacher and student:

- Establishment of tutoring programmes for those ASRs with greatest problems in word recognition and fluency;
- Adoption of a mutual approach where the teacher/tutor acts as scaffolder, working with students towards their independence;
- Recognition of the importance of student choice of reading material;
- Allocation to students of an active role in choosing goals and monitoring outcomes;
- Mobilisation of students to support each other and recommend titles;
- More active use of demonstration by the teacher, especially where comprehension is concerned;
- Establishment of collaborative group work as a regular feature of lessons in content areas as well as English;
- Adoption of a more symmetric and thoughtful approach to classroom interaction, in which students are confident to raise and develop topics in discussion and to make connections between texts and their own knowledge and experience;
- Use of formative assessment to tailor instruction to students' needs.

In the wider school context

- Establishment of a school-wide policy for prioritising literacy and promoting comprehension, featuring explicit instruction in:
 - activation of prior knowledge
 - identifying connections with other texts
 - summarising
 - using imagery
 - question generation;

- Greater emphasis on the volume of reading for all students, particularly voluntary out-of-school reading;
- Provision of a wide range of attractive and accessible texts, that are age and gender appropriate for content area lessons as well as English;
- Inclusion of multi-media and other digital texts appropriate to the daily lives and future work of adolescents;
- Use of the digital environment as a medium for reading promotion;
- Encouragement of the combination of word-level and comprehension interventions.

In the training of teachers:

- Focused training for future teachers of all subjects in strategies that support the process of comprehending texts;
- Increased training for teachers in reading strategies that are supported by research.

In the world beyond school

- Sustained long-term political commitment to support high quality literacy education throughout the school years and beyond;
- Development and publication of e-reading material for ASRs.

6. Some final words

The ADORE project and the report of the High Level Group (HLG, 2012) both conclude that, to make a significant difference to adolescents' reading, none of these elements should be focused on singly. The body of literature reported on in this booklet strongly suggests that only a complete and wide-ranging approach will yield the school improvements that are key to progress, and thus produce the positive results in literacy that are so badly needed. Helping adolescents who struggle with reading is about so much more than decoding.

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Glossary

Phoneme the smallest unit of speech sound that makes a difference to meaning. 'Pin' has 3 phonemes, so does 'fish'. 'Trap' has 4 phonemes.

Grapheme the letter or group of letters that usually represents a single phoneme. 'p', 'i', 'n', 'f', 'sh', 't' and 'r' and are all graphemes

Morpheme the smallest unit of meaning within a word. 'unpleasant' has 3 morphemes; 'teaching' has 2, as does 'cats'.

Morphology the study of such units of meaning

Orthography the spelling system of a language

Phonics an approach to the teaching of reading that focuses on matching phonemes to graphemes

Synthetic phonics a phonic approach that focuses on identifying the individual phoneme/grapheme correspondences then putting these together (synthesising them) to arrive at the word

Analytic phonics a phonic approach that focuses on comparing unknown words with similarly structured known words (such as 'fat' and 'cat'), drawing analogies between the known words and the unknown.

Intonation the use of the voice in spoken language, through variations in of pitch, pause and stress to communicate meaning, complementing the meaning of the words

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